

**BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN  
PROMOTING SELECTED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (GOAL THREE)**

**BY**

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***Abstract***

*Healthy living is crucial to sustainable development for every nation. The paper looks at the role libraries can play in promoting sustainable health development in Ghana. Substance abuse, road accidents, viral hepatitis and access to health information were main area considered. The paper indicates that libraries can achieve this by providing timely and relevant information to support researchers, collaboration with health and other institutions and identifying and addressing health needs of their communities through education and campaigns.*

**Introduction**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the global community is becoming increasingly aware that healthy communities and promoting healthy living is a prerequisite for eliminating poverty, and illiteracy and building strong economies and healthy communities. Nunes, Lee, and O’Riordan (2016:4) are of the view that promoting healthy living is both an essential and effective means to attain all goals under Sustainable Development Goals. A healthy mind or body is critically needed in building a nation for development, the sick person has no interest in his immediate surrounding let alone contributing to the national development. Educating the young and local communities to stay healthy has become a major concern for many nations. Quality health education empowers citizens with the basic knowledge in primary health care. Hence, the non-health institutions like libraries can play a role in helping educate communities on preventive health care measures. Therefore, the paper seeks to explore how libraries in Ghana can design effective educational campaigns to

support prevention of substance abuse, road accidents, viral hepatitis and provide support for researching into vaccines and development of medicines.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the United Nations (2015:2), substantial efforts have been made in improving life expectancy, maternal and child mortality and communicable diseases. Nevertheless, there are other health issues such as substance abuse among the youth, increase in road accidents and the high rate of viral hepatitis infection that have not been given much attention.

### **Methodology**

The study analysed relevant literature from databases such as Elsevier, Science Direct, Google Scholar and BioMed Central. These are leading databases that produce quality peer review journals in scientific, technical and medical information. In addition, literature was also sourced from international organisations such as United Nations and IFLA. Public and private newspapers in Ghana were also used (*the Daily Graphic* and *The Chronicle*). The key concepts of the study were: Sustainable Development Goals, Building Healthy Communities, Substance Abuse, Road Accidents, Viral Hepatitis, Libraries, and Ghana. Search strings employed were:

(“Healthy Communities” AND (“Libraries Role” AND “Sustainable Development Goals”  
OR OR  
“Wellbeing Societies”) “Information Centres Responsibilities”)

(“Health information” OR “health literacy”) AND Libraries OR “Information Centres” AND  
Ghana

“Substance Abuse” OR “Drug Abuse” AND Ghana

“Road Safety” OR “Road Accidents” AND Ghana

## “Viral Hepatitis B” OR “Liver Diseases” AND Ghana

### **Sustainable Development Goal Three (Health)**

The introduction of Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations aim to improve or maintain the Millennium Development Goals that have been achieved for a holistic well-being of lives. In total there are nine Sustainable Development Goals and Goal Three focuses on health. The main aim of Sustainable Development Goal Three is “ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages” (United Nations, 2015: 13-14). Among the many health issues that goal three addresses are:

- Strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol
- Reducing the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents
- Supporting the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and non-communicable diseases that primarily affect developing countries
- Combatting viral hepatitis (United Nations, 2015: 13-14).

### **Some Health Concerns in Ghana**

There are many health concerns in Ghana that threaten the achievement of sustainable development growth. Three areas which libraries can help resolve and which are highlighted by the UN are substance abuse, road accidents, and viral hepatitis. Substance abuse and road accidents are behavioral related and will benefit from public education. Viral hepatitis is a communicable disease and was selected because it has not received as much attention as HIV and AIDS.

### **Road Accidents**

Educating communities on road safety can help reduce the number of road accidents. Statistics from the National Road Safety Commission [NRSC] reported in *Graphic Online* indicate that Ghana recorded 11,378 road accidents nationwide comprising 17,746 vehicles, of which the total number of fatalities stood at 1,990 deaths and 10,154 injuries at the end of November 2016 (Andoh & Esson, 2016: para.1). Children are affected in these accidents. They normally get knocked down when crossing the road (Nartey, n.d.)

### **Substance Abuse**

Substance abuse such as narcotic and dangerous use of alcohol remain a challenge to national development in most developing countries. Statistics by the Narcotic Control Board in 2014 indicated that out of the total number of 50,000 drug users in Ghana, 35,000 were students from junior and senior high schools and tertiary institutions. They also indicated that about 70% youth from the junior and Senior High Schools face the risk of drug abuse in Ghana. Strengthening the prevention of substance abuse, will indeed rescue the youth. (“70% of youth engage in drug...”, 2014:para.1).

### **Virus-Related Hepatitis**

Health promotion campaign can help educate people about Hepatitis. Ofori-Asenso and Agyeman (2016: 6) conducted a research involving thirty studies from all the ten (10) regions in Ghana comprising a total population size of 105,435. The national prevalence of HBV as at 2015 was 12.3 %. Their results also revealed the disease has affected more people within ages 16 to 39.

Virus-related hepatitis caused a greater threat to mortality than tuberculosis or malaria (Lemoine, Eholié & Lacombe, 2015: 469). It killed 1.4 million people worldwide in 2010 (Lozano et. al, 2012: 2089-2128).

### **The Role of Libraries in Ghana in Promoting Building Healthy Communities**

Physicians and surgeons diagnose and treat various ailments, on the other hand, librarians can support research into vaccines and medicines development, educate people on prevention measures to reduce the burden of diseases. Libraries can also collaborate with health professionals and communities to promote educational campaigns, and identify and address a health needs in a community. These can be done through the personnel, space, information and various platforms available in libraries. The message of the libraries in Ghana could focus on awareness creation and preventive measures by adopting the following strategies.

### **Supporting the Research and Development of Vaccines and Medicines.**

Promoting sustainable development depends on access to information (Arko-Cobbah, 2010: 2). Health researchers need to research and provide new vaccines by getting access to relevant and reliable information. Hence, libraries in Ghana could support the researchers with reliable information. Libraries attached to health institutions like University of Health and Allied Sciences, School of Public Health and the others will provide research support services to relieve researchers of the burden of looking for information on new researches on vaccines. Through building a solid and relevant library collection, and selective dissemination of information, all relevant sources of information will be made available to researchers to facilitate their work. Again librarians will organise outreach programmes for health researchers and students on the appropriate means of searching and use of information resources to assist research and practice.

## **Collaboration with Health Professionals and other Institutions**

One key thing that fosters sustainable development in the local communities is services provided by libraries in collaboration with different organisations that are within the locality (Duhon & James, 2013:121). The findings of a research conducted by Dadzie, Martin-Yeboah and Tachie-Donkor (2016:14) show that librarians have been working in partnership with health and other related institutions to solve some health needs of the communities they are embedded in, however it has been subtle.

The Ghana Library Association (GLA) which comprises all types of libraries in Ghana will first have to partner with public health officials and NRSC, the Narcotic Board, traditional leaders, opinion/youth leaders within our communities. The partnership will enable librarians to be trained and equipped to educate their communities and also pave a way for their messages. It will also make it possible for easy access to resource persons anytime they are needed as well as getting materials needed for awareness creation. The library association will organise for the officials to conduct training sessions for librarians at annual general meetings and at other training sessions.

## **Identifying and Educating Communities that are Prone to Substance Abuse**

GLA has flagship projects in selected communities where librarians from all types of libraries volunteer to organise reading programmes for basic schools, specifically at the primary level.

Having focused on education for sometime, the association will now focus on educating the junior and senior high schools on the dangers of substance abuse, especially cigarette, marijuana and alcohol. These students fall within the age bracket of 12 and 19 years. In Ghana most of the bad behaviours are acquired at the junior and secondary schools level. With the help of health

and narcotic board officials libraries will organise talks and film shows on the awareness and dangers of substance abuse to these young ones.

Apart from the secondary school, education will be given at the university campuses. Academic libraries will provide health information literacy during annual health fairs on campuses, orientation for new students, students' week celebrations, posters on the dangers of drug abuse will be posted at vantage places on campus, library websites. Social media tools will also be used as a means to disseminate campaign messages on substance abuse.

Substance abuse is also very common in poorer communities. In such communities, the public/community libraries will organise forums where youth/traditional leaders and other stakeholders can meet at the library to discuss the problem and educate their communities. In this issue the mobile vans of public/community libraries can go into such communities and give education on the dangers of substance abuse.

### **Identifying and Educating Communities Prone Road Accidents**

Libraries can provide information on all sorts of issues and act as a central point for the community by holding forums where the community can meet talk and through problems associated with road accidents and safety. Primary school children are vulnerable when it comes to road use and safety. In Ghana a lot of children have been disabled as a result of using the road (Nartey, n.d.). However, to improve safety many target groups such as parents, drivers and general public need awareness and education on road safety.

The education at the primary schools will concentrate on how to use the road safely by educating them on how to use zebra crossings, traffic lights, crossing where there are no traffic lights. School librarians in collaboration with road safety officials, parents and teachers associations will show films demonstrating road use safety to children. Colourful posters will be pasted at schools as well as in the libraries to reinforce messages.

To educate drivers, especially commercial drivers, and the general public, public education will be given in our communities. For commercial drivers, station masters (supervisors of lorry stations) the public/community libraries will organise forum for drivers and education will be given on the dangers of drunk-driving, overspeeding, the need to employ experienced drivers, and all possible causes of road fatalities. The native language of the community will be used in all such discussions to enable everybody to understand.

Again Universities like the University of Ghana (UG), Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) and others have campus radio which reach out to a wider audience. Librarians once in a while are invited to talk. During such invitations arrangements will be made with radio managers to talk about road accidents.

### **Educating the General Public on Hepatitis**

The general public will be the target group since viral hepatitis such as Hepatitis B is on the increase in Ghana. This will be achieved through giving education on prevention, voluntary testing, the need to seek early treatment and assuring the public that it is treatable. GIJ librarians in collaboration with lecturers, radio station manager can achieve this. By the special focus of the Institute on journalism, public relations, advertising and marketing and health communication, it



places the Institute at the forefront of educating the general public. Already, our students produce three newspapers, *The Communicator*, *PR Today* and *Life Style*. The library staff are always given an opportunity to contribute to these publications. Our input has always been on information literacy, but librarians could capitalise on these opportunities and provide health information literacy too.

Apart from GIJ, libraries can make good use of student groups who are into outreach programmes such as “Keteke” at GIJ and “Messengers of Hope” at UG. “Keteke” goes to deprived communities in the rural areas during vacations to teach school children and give general education to the communities. “Messengers of Hope” goes to orphanages, correctional centres and prisons. Librarians in these universities just have to convince them to talk about hepatitis to their audience.

### **Feasibility of the Strategies**

The approaches mentioned are all feasible and cheaper to implement because the health officials and NRSC in Ghana have been sourcing for more hands to educate the public on preventive measures using professionals in the art industry, teachers and churches. In Ghana teachers have extensively been used in this direction. Between the years 1997 to 2000 when I was a primary school teacher, I was trained to administer the polio vaccine (oral administration). I find my new profession - a librarian an information specialist more appropriate to be used for such programmes than before.

Again, GLA is already involved in educating schools in selected communities on reading. Providing health information literacy would not be difficult to embark on. Just as volunteers have

always been available for the reading programme, librarians will volunteer to educate their communities on preventive health measures.

Researching and supporting research is one of the core functions of libraries, especially academic and research libraries. Providing support for researchers into is not different from what we do as librarians.

Furthermore, it is possible to practice the strategies mentioned above because libraries already have the audience. The communities in which the various types of libraries are embedded cut across all categories of people, even if all types of libraries concentrate only on their users, the above selected goals under SDG Three would be achieved.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is a high burden of substance abuse among the youth, increase in road accidents and chronic viral hepatitis infection among Ghanaians. Solving this will require an approach that involves information provision institutions like libraries. Through the GLA, partnership with stakeholder institutions, designing effective health information messages, using campus radio stations, students' clubs coupled with our skills in researching, searching and providing all kinds of information, libraries in Ghana can immensely help in achieving sustainable health development by 2030. These are feasible and low cost since they are not very different from the roles of libraries play in their communities and the fact that libraries already have the audience. There is urgent need for the libraries in Ghana to prioritise health information needs of our communities as we have successfully done in reading and information literacy.

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